

أصول الحوار وآدابه في الإسلام

The Rules & Regulations Of Debating In Islam

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Dear brothers,

This is an article about the rules and regulations of debate in Islam, containing the following elements:

- 1) Introduction to debate and its objectives.
- 2) The cause of differences in opinion between people.
- 3) A total explanation of rules of debate and its principles.
- 4) The explanation of its rules and characteristics.

I seek Allaah's Guidance and Acceptance.

Preface

Praise be to Allaah, the Almighty. May His Peace and Blessings be upon His Messenger, the noblest of His Creation and His chosen one among His Messengers, Muhammad, our master and our Messenger. He sent him with truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. He delivered the Message, fulfilled the task assigned to him, and gave good advice to the Ummah (Nation). He placed us on a clean and clear path, at night or day, it is the same, and no-one deviates from it except the doomed. May Allaah bless him, and may His grace and Peace be upon the Prophet's kith and kin, and on his noble wives, the mothers of the believers. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet's Companions and all believers, until the Day of Judgment.

Definition

The word 'debate' (arabic: *Hiwaar* or *Jidaal*) occurs in the Qur'aan as the following example shows:

قُدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّتِي تُجَادِلُكَ فِي زَوْجِهَا وَتَشْتَكِي إِلَى
الَّهِ وَالَّهُ يَسْمَعُ تَحَاوُرَكُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

"Indeed Allaah has heard the statement of her (Khawlah bint Tha'labah) that disputes with you (O Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam)) concerning her husband (Aus bin As-Saamit), and complains to Allaah. And Allaah hears the argument between you both. Verily, Allaah is All-Hearer, All-Seer." [Al-Mujâdilah (58):1]

In conventional usage, a debate is a discussion between two or more parties aiming at modification of opinions, proof of an argument, demonstration of the truth, falsification of suspicions, and a refutation of unfounded statements and concepts.

Some of the methods employed in debate are the laws of logic and the rules of syllogism such as cause and effect, as expounded in books on logic, theology, and rules of research, polemics, and principles of jurisprudence.¹

Objectives Of Debating

The main objectives of a debate are the substantiation of the truth, with proof and refutation of doubts and fallacious statements and propositions. It follows that debate should be held with the sincere cooperation of the debaters, to unveil the truth and state this to one's partner correctly. A participant ought to work towards revealing to his partner what the latter fails to perceive, and to follow the correct methods of inference in order to arrive at the truth. al-Haafidh ath-Dhahabee says, in this connection:

"A debate is only justified to unveil the truth, so that the more knowledgeable should impart knowledge to the less knowledgeable; to stimulate a weaker intellect."²

These are the original objectives that are so clear and plain. Besides the main objectives, there are secondary or supportive objectives of debate. Some of these objectives are listed below:

- A general preliminary objective is getting acquainted with the other party's or parties' point of view.
- Reaching a compromise that satisfies all the parties concerned; for it is an important primary objective.
- Investigating, broad-mindedly, and bringing into play diverse approaches and conceptualisations, with a view of ensuring better and more feasible results, even for later debates.

Differences Among People Is A Fact

It is natural that differences will always exist among people; everywhere and at all times. There has always been diversity of colour, language, customs, concepts, intellect and degrees of knowledge. This is a sign of Allaah's omnipotence as the following verse from the Qur'aan states:

وَمِنْ عَائِتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَخْتِلَافُ أَسْنَاتِكُمْ
وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

"And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge." [ar-Room (30):22]

These external variations reflect internal variations: of opinions, attitudes and objectives. This also is mentioned in several places of the Qur'aan. Here is an example:

¹ see al-Zurqaanee, *Sharh al-Mawaheb* vol. V p390

² see al-Jirjaanee, *Ta'rifaat*, under "Jadal" and "al-Misbaah al-Muneer" under "Hiwaar" and "Jadal"

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَّلُونَ
مُخْتَلِفِينَ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقُهُمْ

"And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one *Ummah* [nation or community (following one religion only i.e. Islam)], but they will not cease to disagree. Except him on whom your Lord has bestowed His Mercy (the follower of truth - Islamic Monotheism) and for that did He create them." [Hood (11):118-119]

al-Fakhr al-Raazi comments saying,

"This verse indicates the diversity in people's creeds, moral standards and behaviour."

I would like to elaborate the above verse by saying that had Allaah so willed, all humans would have embraced one religion by instinct and original creation (arabic: *al-fitrah*). But in this case, they would cease to be human, in the way that we know them; their social life would be something similar to that of bees and ants, and in spirit they would be like angels, who are disposed by their creation to embrace truth and obey all that they are commanded to by Allaah. There would be no room for conflict or disagreement among them. But Allaah, in His Wisdom, has chosen to create humans otherwise. They have to acquire knowledge rather than have it as an inspired ability. They have the volition to choose what to do and to consider different possibilities of outcome. They are not predestined to behave in a fixed way. They vary widely in their abilities and capacity for acquiring knowledge and preferences.

As for the phrase "**and for that did He create them.**" in the above-quoted verse, it may not be presumed to mean that Allaah created humans so that they should disagree. It is known from other texts that Allaah created humans to worship Him. The meaning of the above phrase is rather that Allaah created humans so that there would be among them a group of well-guided and a group of misguided; the former is destined to enter Paradise and the latter is to be punished in Hell.

In addition, the following may be deduced from the same phrase: Allaah created humans so that they would, because of their diversity in abilities and disposition, choose different professions, and this would make for stability in the world. It is through humans that Allaah carries out His ordinances. Men employ other men to do work for them.³

There is in the creation of humans the propensity for variation in learning, viewpoints and feelings, this in turn will lead to variation in will-power and preference, faith, obedience and disobedience are a part of this.⁴

The Self Evidence Of The Truth

Having asserted that variation in people's intellects, conceptions and propensity for conflict is a fact, it is important to add that Allaah has highlighted the Path of the truth with landmarks and signs. If we refer again to the above verse, "**And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one *Ummah*, but they will not cease to disagree. Except him on whom your**

³ see *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, vol. IV chapter 12, p164 and *Tafseer al-Qasimi*, vol. IX, p182.

⁴ *Tafseer al-Manar*, vol. XII, p194.

Lord has bestowed His Mercy..” we see that the last part refers to this reality. In another verse this point is more obvious:

فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ عَامَلُوا لِمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ يَادِنَهُ

“Then Allaah by His Leave guided those who believed to the truth of that wherein they differed.” [Al-Baqarah (2):113]

Free from the control of desires and whims, the soul of man will not fail to arrive at the truth, if man searches diligently for it. Man has been endowed, since his original creation, with a guide (within himself) to indicate the truth. This is the essence of the following verse from the Qur'aan:

**فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلَّدِينِ حَنِيفًا فَطَرَ اللَّهُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا
تَبْدِيلَ لِخُلُقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيْمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ**

“So set your face towards the religion (of pure Islamic Monotheism) *Hanifa* (worship none but Allâh Alone) *Allaah's Fitrah* (i.e. Allaah's Islamic Monotheism), with which He has created mankind. No change let there be in *Khalq-illaah* (i.e. the Religion of Allaah - Islamic Monotheism), that is the straight religion, but most of men know not.” [Ar-Room (30):30]

The following tradition of the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) replicates the same point:

“Every new born is endowed with Fitrah (Islamic Monotheism, original uncorrupted state). It is his parents who later make of him a Jew, Christian or Majoos (Magian, fire-worshipper); in the same way animals are born whole, with their noses intact, but it is humans who later cut their noses.”

The fundamentals of faith, the main virtues and the main vices, such as all sensible people would unanimously agree upon, are stated in the Qur'aan in clear lucid language that leaves no room for dispute or misinterpretation. This part of the Book is called 'The Mother of the Book,' (i.e., the foundation of the Book), as it comprises all the rules (laws). No-one may contradict such verses nor tamper with them to satisfy his whims or doubts. Nor may they be made the subject of arbitrary or unjustified interpretation, as we will mention about the essence of debate. But excluding the above category, scholars may disagree about any other points. It is not a sin to differ; a scholar will be rather rewarded in the Hereafter when he errs in his judgment, and is even doubly rewarded when he is right. This is a great incentive for scholars to exert themselves and explain controversial issues with a view to revealing the truth and suggesting the best available course for the community. This is a manifestation of the great Wisdom of the Lord.

Points Of Agreement

Stressing the points of agreement at the beginning ensures a cordial and amicable debate. It will also be a more fruitful and focused debate.

By stressing and dwelling on points of agreement a debater will be more likely to find a common ground and a good starting point for fruitful interaction. A cordial start will bridge the gap and help the debaters to proceed in a positive conciliatory manner.

It would otherwise be a confronted debate if the debaters raised controversial issues at the outset. If they do, they will have left little chances for a successful debate. It will be a narrow and tense debate. The participants may be inattentive to each other's view points; each looking for his chance to expose the other's slips or faults. Those who compete would become bitter rivals rather than reaching useful conclusions. An experienced debater says in this regard:

"Make your partner answer in the affirmative and try to prevent him from saying 'No', as far as you can, because once he says 'No', his pride will impel him to adhere to his word; an answer of 'No', is not just a monosyllable. The whole person's nerves, muscles and glands will be primed for it. It is a concerted drive to renounce. In contrast, the word 'Yes', is soft and costs little. It does not tax the body with any exertion."⁵

It would be helpful, in this regard, to make the other party aware of your sharing some of his conceptions, by declaring your approval of and satisfaction with his correct ideas and sound imformation. It would be an excellent achievement to attain a level of objectivity and impartiality.

Some of our scholars have observed that ignorance is mainly exhibited in denial and renunciation, rather than affirmation. It is easier for a person to be on firm ground about what he asserts, rather than about what he denies. Therefore, disputes that bring about dogmatic attitudes are usually the result of being right about what one asserts but wrong about what one denies.

Principles Of Debating

Principle One:

By adhering to scientific methods. Two of these methods are as follows:

1. Presenting evidence to prove or support a claim.
2. Observing accuracy while referring to authority.

The above two methods have been neatly expressed by Muslim scholars in an aphorism, "If quoting, maintain accuracy; if claiming, provide proof."

The above rules may be supported with some verses from the Qur'aan:

فُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَنَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

"Say (O Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam)),

"Produce your proof if you are truthful." [Al-Baqarah (2):111]

فُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَنَكُمْ هَذَا ذِكْرٌ مَّنْ مَعَى وَذِكْرٌ مَّنْ قَبْلَى

"Say: "Bring your proof: This (the Qur'aan) is the Reminder for those with me and the Reminder for those before me." [Al-Anbiyaa' (21):24]

فُلْ فَأْتُوا بِالْتُّورَاهِ فَاتُّلُوهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

"Say (O Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam)): "Bring here the Tauraat (Torah) and recite it, if you are truthful." [Aali-Imraan (3):93]

⁵ Dr Saalih as-Suhaymee, *Tanbeeh Oolil-Absaar*, adapted

Principle Two:

Freedom from contradiction in the debater's statement and proofs. Evidently, contradiction invalidates statements. Let us give two examples to illustrate this point:

1. Like other disbelievers, Pharaoh charged Prophet Moses, may the Peace and Blessings of Allaah be upon him, with being a "magician or madman." Disbelievers, contemporary with Prophet Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said the same of him. However, 'magic' and 'madness' are incompatible, as a magician is known for cleverness, wit and cunning, which is quite the opposite for a madman. This shows the absurdity of their charge.
2. The disbelieving Quraish charged the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) with supporting his claim with 'continuous magic'. Allah said: **"And if they see a sign, they turn away, and say: "This is continuous magic."** [Al-Qamar (54):2] This charge is however, an obvious contradiction. Magic cannot be continuous, and what is continuous cannot be magic.

Principle Three:

A proof should not be a repetition of a claim. If it is so, it will not be a proof at all, but a reiteration of a claim in different words. Some debaters are skilled at manipulating language so that what they say would seem to be a proof, but it is not more than restating the first assumption. It is a deviation from an honest and straightforward discussion towards finding the truth.

Principle Four:

Agreeing on indisputable and fixed basic issue. Such points can refer to a priority, intellectual concepts which are not contested by honest thinking persons, such as the goodness of truthfulness, the badness of lying, thanking a good-doer and punishing an evil-doer. On the other hand, the basic issues can be religious concepts, which are common to the debaters. By having solid (given) issues as a reference, it would be possible to discriminate between a truth-seeker and another who is only disputing for the sake of dispute.

In Islam, for instance, such matters as belief in the Oneness of Allaah, His attributes of perfection and freedom of imperfection, the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), the Qur'aan as the Word of Allaah, surrender to Allaah's Judgement; such as ordinances as the proper dress for Muslim women, polygamy, prohibition of usury, alcoholic drinks and adultery, are all matters of certainty, and so may not be taken as dispute subjects for believers. Surrender to Allaah's Judgement, for instance, is known to be part of the creed by such verses of the Qur'aan, as the following:

فَلَا وَرَبَّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ

"But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam)) judge in all disputes between them.." [An-Nisaa' (4):65]

وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَسِيْقُونَ

"And whosoever does not judge by what Allaah has revealed (then) such (people) are the *Faasiqoon* (the rebellious i.e. disobedient (of a lesser degree) to Allaah." [Al-Maa'idah (5):47]

Similarly, proper dress for a Muslim woman is also categorically enjoined by such verses as:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَا زَوْجَكَ وَبَنْتَكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَبَابِهِنَّ

"O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies.."
[Al-Ahzaab (33):59]

It would be legitimate to lay down, for discussion such details as the use of the veil for the face, but the principle of proper dress, itself, is mandatory. The same may be said of usury, which has been prohibited in unequivocal terms. On the other hand, debates may be held concerning its details and practical examples used.

In view of the above, it would be a mistake on the part of a Muslim to have a debate with a communist or atheist about matters of the Islamic faith, such as the ones given above. As the other party does not accept the Islamic Truths, to begin with; the right starting points would be the principal religion, the God-hood and Lordship of Allaah, the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) and the truthfulness of the Qur'aan.

Therefore, we say it is a mistake on the part of some intellectuals and writers to raise issues like the application of the Sharee'ah, a Muslim woman's proper dress, polygamy and similar topics, in the mass media, in articles and seminars, with a view to proving the legitimacy of such legislation.

It would not be wrong, on the other hand, if the purpose of raising such topics was to reflect on the wisdom and goodness of this legislation. The distinction between the two purposes is supported by the following verse:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا
أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيْرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ

"It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allaah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision." [Al-Ahzaab (33):36]

.....to be continued shortly, inshaa'Allaah